CHAPTER IV
THE SERVANTS OF
INDIA SOCIETY IN KERALA

There was a spate of social reform movements in Kerala in the early decades of the 20th century. These were initiated mainly by religious and spiritual leaders. A few communal organisations also came up during this period and they sought to cure the ill from which the particular community was suffering.\(^1\) Besides religious zeal, they were motivated by progressive views.\(^2\) They fought against superstitious practices as well as caste based social discrimination.\(^3\) Many of the reformers possessed extra ordinary revolutionary spirit because they had to fight both against the conventions and traditions of their own society as well as against authorities.\(^4\) Eventually their movements had to be aligned with political developments. Vagbhatananda for example strongly supported the peasant's movements of north Malabar, because he believed that caste system and related social evils were in part

---

responsible for the slavery of the peasants. But it is quite surprising that the Ernad taluk of Malabar was rather untouched by these progressive developments. Though the largest of the taluks in Malabar, Ernad was quite backward educationally. Extremely fertile and beautiful in landscape Ernad was typical for its ignorance, superstitions, social evils, poverty and fanaticism. It had been the locale for about fifty riots by peasants.

Inhabitants of Ernad were mostly Mappilas (Muhammadans) who were mainly agricultural workers and hired labourers, belonging to the lower strata of the Muslim population. Since the land was mostly owned by the janmis (landlords), they had to labour under them. Many of them worked on the British plantations. They took land on lease and worked hard, but the benefit and profit went to the janmis. Majority of them were poor and without substantial property in land or goods. This terrible exploitation was causing widespread unrest among the peasants. Earlier the landlord-tenant relationship was a feudal one. Gradually, following British regulations, the landlords were empowered with the right to evict tenants. The landlords thus became pure parasites in relation to the people and were extremely loyal to

---

7 Sukbir Choudhary, Moplah Uprising (1921-23), Delhi, 1977, pp.12, 13.
the British. The result of this exploitative socio-economic order was a steady and continuous pauperization of the people.\textsuperscript{8}

In the meantime, the nationalist movement was gaining momentum in Kerala. Following the resolutions in the 1920 Nagpur Congress, there began Non-cooperation movement in Malabar also. During this period when the Congress decided to take up the Khilafat movement along with the Non-cooperation, it had great impact in Malabar as was evident from the large-scale participation of people in both movements.\textsuperscript{9}

Even in the early years of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century tenant protests were in vogue in Malabar. In the Malabar District Conferences, which were organized from 1916 onwards, the tenants were demanding to get a resolution passed on landlord - tenant relationship. But that did not happen as late as 1920 when in the Manjeri District Conference, for the first time, a resolution was passed demanding a legislation to regulate landlord-tenant relationship.\textsuperscript{10} The resolution was moved by K.P. Raman Menon who represented the extremist faction of the Congress. The Manjeri political conference was mainly intended to discuss the Montegue-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, which were formulated following the protests of the Home-Rule League.


\textsuperscript{10} K. Madhavan Nair, \textit{Op.cit.}, p.82.
These Reforms affected a cleavage within the Congress party of Kerala as "moderates" (those who supported the Reforms) and, the "extremists" (those who were against the Reforms). The main resolution moved by K.P. Raman Menon rejected the reforms and demanded self-rule. Again, in the Manjeri Conference, the peasants and workers of Ernad joined the extremist faction and, the landlords and those representing vested interests joined the moderate faction.\textsuperscript{11} The last of this Malabar District Conference precipitated a polarization in Kerala politics especially in Malabar.\textsuperscript{12}

The next important political event was the first Kerala State Conference of the Congress held at Ottapalam in April 1921, presided over by T. Prakasam. Representatives from various parts of Kerala attended the conference. It was therefore said that since the period of the Perumals, Kerala was trying to become one single unit under the Congress leadership. Naturally this sense of unity and resurgence was quite antagonistic to the Empire. From the very beginning of this movement, the British Government in India arrested its foremost leaders like Madhavan Nair, U. Gopala Menon, Ponmadath Moideen Koya along with Mr. Yakoob Hassan who was touring in Malabar in connection with the Khilafat campaign and imprisoned them at

\textsuperscript{12} EMS, \textit{Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhumi}, (Mal.) Thiruvananthapuram, 2000, p.309.
Kannur jail for 6 months\textsuperscript{13} conviction. Even as the peoples' excitement could not be let down by such measures, at the venue of the Ottapalam conference its leader P. Ramunni Menon and a few workers were brutally manhandled for no obvious reasons. The government's plan was a dual policy by which they wanted to suppress a section of the people by a reign of terror on the one hand and, on the other to provoke another section to outrages so that they could be suppressed on that ground. The Government was thus able to divide the people who were for a time unified in the Khilafat - Swaraj campaigns. And this divisive strategy of the government eventually paved the way for the Malabar riot, which was also called Mappila, or Khilafat riot.\textsuperscript{14}

Ernad was the biggest of the nine taluks of the British Malabar. It had an area of 966 square miles and lies between Chaliyar on the north and Kadalundi River in the South and, from Nilgiri in the East to the Arabian sea on the West. It was a vast stretch of land interspersed with hills, forests, valleys and paddy fields. Area wise it comprises one fifth of Malabar and contained the $\frac{1}{7}$ of its population.\textsuperscript{15} In addition to their economic backwardness the people of this area suffered from acute educational backwardness. The major parts of the population were Mappilas who were

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Perunna K.N. Nair, \textit{Op.cit.}, pp.36-37.
\end{itemize}
largely tenants. The revolt was therefore simplistically called Moplah Rebellion. But a great leader like Abdu Rehman described it as Malabar Rebellion because basically it was a rebellion of the oppressed peasants against the landlords and the British.17 Moyarath Sankaran, a prominent freedom fighter of the period observed that the revolt was not one between the Hindus and Muslims but such a colouring, was given to it by the contemporary press. As a result even the national movement disfavoured the peasant revolt. Even Gandhiji failed to understand the machinations of the press and the British officers in this respect. According to Moyarath, it was quite ironic that in the contemporary history of Kerala the Malabar peasant revolt of 1921 was wrongly described as Mappila riot or Hindu - Muslim riot.18 In fact the riot was begun by only a very small section of the Mappilas. But later when the British military and police began to attack the Mappila community in an indiscrete manner, majority of the Muslims, with the exception of the rich and the educated got involved in the riot. The rebellion was strictly against the British.19

19 M. Gangadharan, Mappila Padanangal, (Mal.), Kozhikode, 2004, pp.37, 44.
The rebellion was a bitter experience for both the Mappilas and the Hindu communities. Great atrocities were meted out on to the people like burning of houses, molesting of women and widespread arrests.\textsuperscript{20} It is estimated that nearly 2337 were killed and 1652 wounded while 45404 surrendered or were captured.\textsuperscript{21} According to Conrad Wood, there were certain related problems, which culminated the rebellion of 1921, such as the role of religion, the unrest of the rural population, the impact of imperialism on rural society and, the inspiration of the nationalist movement.\textsuperscript{22} According to Prof. Stephen F. Dale the violence of the peasant outbreak under British rule represents "a response to a new economic and political context created by the British."\textsuperscript{23} M. Gangadhara Menon argues that the outbreak of the rebellion was, in the main, caused by the spirit of defiance against the British authority within a section of Khilafatist's. In his view, this defiance was shaped by the traditional Mappila militancy and their political aspirations raised by the spirit of pan-Islamism and Khilafat agitation. Thus a combination of features of a revolt against alien rule, a violent rising against oppressive land relations and

\textsuperscript{20} Bombay, Chronicle, 30 Sept. 1921, NMML Microfilm, New Delhi.
\textsuperscript{21} Home Pol 1923, F. No.1929/R, NAI, New Delhi.
\textsuperscript{22} Conrad Wood, Moplah Rebellion and its Genesis, New Delhi, 1987,p.5.
a struggle for the establishment of political power based on religious (Islamic) tenets made it a complex upheaval.24

Whatever be the cause and character of the rebellion it had very serious consequences in Kerala both in social relations as well as in politics.25 The rebellion attracted not only British antagonism26 but also seriously affected the national movement.27 It was felt difficult to conduct the smooth and peaceful functioning of the Indian National Congress in South Malabar.28 The government imposed ban on freedom of speech and travel, which adversely affected the functioning of Congress committees and other political associations.29 Moreover the rebellion brought about a communal divide and, in the subsequent months, the Congress could not come to the forefront of the social and political activities.30 It was also alleged that the Congress did not take any step to check the cruelties of the British government in the final phase of the rebellion. It was argued that if the Congress had supported the

rebellion and adopted an anti-British stand, the government could not have ventured to let loose a reign of terror in Malabar.\textsuperscript{31}

Reports about police atrocities and the forced conversions by the rebels appeared in the newspapers. Kesava Menon himself had written in *The Hindu* about these matters. In a atmosphere of fear and distrust the Hindu-Muslim relationship weakened in Malabar.\textsuperscript{32} The divisive effects of the rebellion were so deep that with very few exceptions the "Mappilas and Hindus were living together without being together."\textsuperscript{33} One of the negative consequences of this complex situation was that, it provided a fertile ground for an unprecedented development of communal politics in Malabar in the subsequent decades. The emergence of Muslim League as a potential factor in Kerala politics was attributed to the bitter experiences of the Mappilas in 1921.\textsuperscript{34}

However, eminent leaders of the Khilafat-Non Co-operation movement like Muhammed Abdurahiman, E. Moidu Moulavi, K.P. Kesava Menon, M.P. Narayana Menon, K. Madhavan Nair, K. Kelappan, U. Gopala Menon etc. made persistent attempts to pacify the rebels and persuaded them to desist

\begin{footnotes}
\item[34] P.A. Syed Mohammed, *Kerala Muslim Charithram* (Mal.) Thrissur, 1969, p.246.
\end{footnotes}
from violent activities. It has also been pointed out that the growth of a separatist Muslim politics in northern India was also to an extent one of the impacts of the Malabar Rebellion. The sufferings of the Mappilas in Malabar roused the sentiments of their counterparts elsewhere in India. The Muslims of the Northern Provinces of India generously responded to the appeals for help. Muhammed Abdu Rehman took special interest in bringing the issue to the attention of government as well as the public. When his letter to the District Collector calling for government help was turned down, he sent the letter to the newspapers. The letter published in the Bombay Chronicle and The Hindu aroused great public sympathy in the matter. Following the reports Abdu Rehman was arrested. But his letter was well received by the public. In Bombay a huge meeting was convened at Chaupatti to discuss the issue and to raise funds for Mappila relief. Kesava Menon also had written to The Hindu about the police atrocities on the rebels and other consequences, as a result of which he attracted hatred both from the government as well as from a section of the natives. Conflicting narratives about the rebellion paved the way for partisan attitude towards the rebellion. It flared up communal campaigns in the Northern Provinces. The press run by Hindus

38 Ibid., p.113; M. Rasheed, Muhammed Abdurahiman (Mal.), Kozhikode, 1998, p.25.
and their leadership campaigned against the Mappilas. At the same time propaganda through pamphlets also came up giving horrible descriptions of the sufferings of Hindus consequent on the Mappila Rebellion in Malabar. The confrontation between the two communities occurred in various parts of north India and caused deep fissures in the erstwhile Hindu-Muslim unity, which was strenuously forged as an essential condition for the struggle for freedom. As Tara Chand noted, "A vicious circle of accusation and counter accusation was set up which created the heat in which the tender plant of Hindu-Muslim unity began to wither." K.M. Panikkar commenting on the specific situation in Malabar, observed that the Hindu-Muslim riots had caused a psychic divide among the two communities.

The rebellion created untold miseries to the people of Malabar belonging to both the communities. The scenario presented two pictures of acute suffering. On the one side, there was the huge mass of refugees estimated about 25,000, ranging from high caste Namboodiris to lower caste groups. They were in fact uprooted from their home villages and came to relief camps set up in distant places like Kozhikode. It was a mixed assortment of men and women whose houses were burnt, their wealth and

---

earnings looted and women molested. They comprised also destitute women and children whose protectors were killed by the rebels. Rebels had even injured their minds as their religious faith was dishonoured by the rebels through destruction and desecration of temples and forced conversions.\(^4^4\)

Equally pathetic was the condition of Mappilas. Though a considerable number of them including the rich and the educated did not support the rebellion, they were punished by the rebels for the very same reason. The British army and the police were quite ruthless and indiscriminate in quelling the rebellion.\(^4^5\) Appeals were made to the government as well as to the public for generous help. As the situation was variously understood, help came from various corners in the shape of relief measures and reconstruction programmes. These range from local munificence of individuals and royal families. In several places outside Malabar the people constituted relief committees. Royal houses like Samudiri Kovilakam, Kottakkal Kovilakam, the Mankata Krishnavarma Raja, Kavalappara Nair, Kulathur Sulapani Varrier and Kottakkal P.S. Varrier were all reported to have spent huge sums of money and provided food and shelter to the victims of the rebellion.\(^4^6\)

---

The Congress was severely criticised both by the people and the government, for having initiated the Mappilas into the rebellion through the Khilafat-Non-Co-operation movement. But it was a fact that many janmies were Congress supporters, though they had kept away from the Congress after the Manjeri conference. At the same time, with the Manjeri conference, tenants joined the Congress in large scale. The conference passed a resolution demanding legislation to define tenant-landlord relationship much against the protests of the landlords. It was thus a very important event in the development of the nationalist movement in Malabar.\(^{47}\) The Congress had therefore taken it up as its responsibility to begin relief operations for the refugees and victims of the rebellion. Thus a relief committee was organized at Calicut, mainly at the initiative of the veteran Congress-Khilafat leader, K. Madhavan Nair.\(^{48}\) Other members of the Congress Relief Committee at Calicut were Ambalakkad Karunakara Menon, K.P. Kesava Menon, P. Achuthan, K.V. Gopala Menon etc. They opened relief camps at Azhchavattom and Francis Road in Calicut. However the Congress was not successful in extending their support to the riot ridden areas, because as marital low was imposed on those areas the Congress leaders could not go to those places. Nor could the Mappilas move out of their areas.\(^{49}\)


On his release from Jail on August 11, 1923 Muhammad Abdurahiman went round the riot torn areas. He was very much depressed at the miserable plight of the people, who were put down by the rebellion. He was especially moved by the wretched condition of the children who were to become future citizens. With these anxieties he attended the Khilafat conference at Kakinada. After the conference he met several philanthropists in North India. He approached the Qasuri family of Punjab. Moulana Abdul Khadar Qasuri was the founder of Jamiat-e-Dwat-e-Tablig-e-Islam, the headquarters of which was in Poona. Qasuri, with his two sons and colleagues visited the riot-ridden areas of Malabar. They formed six relief camps in various places and an orphanage at Calicut. This was the genesis of JDT. Islam institutions in Calicut.

In addition to these works, there were several other relief operations like Mappila Amelioration Committee which was formed by pro-British non Khilafatist Muslim notables of Madras Presidency with the support of Pompey of YMCA. The president of the committee was Jamal Muhammed Sahib, a notable merchant. Sir Mohamed Usman Sahib, the Madras Governor and home member, B. Poker Sahib, T.M. Moidu Sahib were its other office

51 Parappil Muhammed Koya, Kozhikkode Muslimkalute Charithram (Mal.), Calicut, 1994, pp.189-190.
bearers. An important role in the relief operations was played by voluntary organizations like YMCA, Aryasamaj (Lahore), Seva Sadan Society (Poona) and the Servants of India Society. In the first phase of the relief work these agencies worked separately with different agenda. But later, with a view to bring about uniformity of work and activities and, to achieve greater efficiency, their relief work merged into Malabar Central Relief Committee (hereafter MCRC). This committee worked in consultation with the government officers including the District Magistrate. With the formation of the MCRC relief work became much more systematic.

Of the various agencies who conducted relief work in Malabar, special mention must be made of the work done by the Servants of India Society. A delegation of the Society from its headquarters at Poona visited Malabar immediately after the rebellion. The delegation led by G.K. Devadhar met important personalities of the area and tried to get first hand information about the rebellion. In the beginning they must have been influenced by the Hindu propaganda in the North about the rebellion. This is evident from the following statement on the "Malabar Relief" reported in The Servant of India, a weekly newspaper published by the Servants of India Society, Poona:

52 Ibid. p.167.
The rebellion of the Mappila was one of the direct calamities that ever befell Malabar, affecting an area of nearly 2000 sq. miles and a population of nearly 2 million souls. The fanatical Mappilas committed on their more numerous neighbours every kind of conceivable atrocity. Relief on an extensive scale was needed for a comparatively long period and the manner in which the people of the West coast in particular and of the country in general rose to the occasion is highly creditable to the self governing capacity of India, the more so because the relief was organized and administered adequately and efficiently. Solely by non-officials, all the energies of the Government and its local officials being required for putting down the rebellion.\textsuperscript{54}

The statement, on close reading, implies a mixed response born out by prejudice, misunderstanding and a zeal for consolation and amelioration. It was also reported that G.K. Devadhar in a conversation with P.S. Varrier of Kottakkal was rather reluctant about giving assistance to the Mappilas, for he thought that would only be helping the rebels. But Varrier, the great physician and humanist convinced Devadhar of the true situation. "Rebellion is not the creation of women and children, but of their men. By this time they are living the pittiest of life. It is a moral duty of every one to protect them in the name of humanity".\textsuperscript{55} Through such meetings and through enquiries

\textsuperscript{54} The Servant of India, A Weekly Published by the Servants of India Society, Poona, 10 May 1923, p.172.

\textsuperscript{55} Keezhedath Vasudevan Nair, Jeevitha Katha - Vydya Ratnam P.S. Varrier (Mal.), Kottakkal, 1989, p.132.
conducted on their own Devadhar and his men were convinced of the need for urgent relief work in the rebellion-hit area. Through his own humanitarian work in this connection by providing food and shelter in the premises of his Aryavydyasala at Kottakkal and by repeatedly appealing to the authorities to protect the Mappilas from the perils of the rebellion, Varrier was proving himself a model of service at a time of great distress.\(^{56}\)

Moved by the gruesome situation of Malabar and the agonizing condition of the victims of the rebellion, both Mappilas and Hindus, Devadhar issued statements seeking help from the public especially from the Northern Provinces.\(^{57}\) He was able to procure a huge amount of money from such far off places as Madras, Bangalore, Bombay, Allahabad, Delhi, Lahore as well as from benevolent people of Malabar. In Bombay a Malabar Relief Fund was set up and they sent money and materials to Malabar.\(^{58}\) In Madras a Sheriff's meeting was convened and a committee was appointed to collect funds from the whole of the Presidency. In due course a centre of the Servants of India Society was established at Calicut.\(^{59}\) The workers of the Society who were highly inspired by the ideals and teaching of its master Gokhale lost no time in organizing relief work. Initially they associated

---


\(^{57}\) G.K. Devadhar, "A Statement on Resume of Relief and Need for Help" File No.12, BSM Papers, NMML.


\(^{59}\) *Ibid.*
themselves with the *Mappila Aid* Committee formed at Calicut, which was converted into a Central Relief Committee for looking after the administration of relief in Calicut and other centres.\(^60\)

The Servants of India Society rendered commendable services in the activities of the Malabar Central Relief Committee. Bringing alms to the riot victims scattered at various places was a hazardous task owing to the lack of transport facilities. The rebels had blocked the roads to the troubled areas by destroying bridges, and felling trees across the roads and made them quite impassable by lying in ambush at strategical points. The number of refugees was increasing day by day. The Servants of India Society along with the YMCA and other bodies offered workers for the organization and administration of relief and for the collection of funds.\(^61\) A brief life sketch of the important personalities associated with the Servants of India Society (Kerala) is given below.

**G.K. Devadhar**

Gopal Krishna Devadhar was born on 21\(^{st}\) August 1871 in a poor family in Poona. Even as a student he had to work hard to earn money for his studies. He passed his B.A. in 1897 and became a teacher in Bombay; in due course he got in touch with the Seva Sadan, Poona. It was an institution


\(^61\) The Servant of India, 1923, p.172.
founded by late B.M. Malabari and Dayaram Gudumal, which gave training to orphaned woman for employment. He associated himself with Gandhiji's Harijan Movement, and the works related to the welfare of women. He was chiefly instrumental in developing the co-operative movement in India. Devadhar was a student of New English School and Fergusson College Poona for nearly eight years, with which Gokhale's name was so richly connected. In the 1900s Devadhar was also engaged in the work of India, a weekly journal of the British committee of the Congress. As part of "India work" he visited various parts of the country reporting the condition of India and seeking subscription for the journal. Devadhar was very much concerned about the educational backwardness of India. Already he had been a working member of the Aryan Education Society, Bombay. He sought Gokhale's permission for an interview to know more about the cause of education. He expressed his desire to get the benefit of the "large experience and great wisdom" of Gokhale "in the matter of education, the sacred sphere of which I am on the eve of entering." Devadhar had found Gokhale to be a model in public life. Congratulating Gokhale on being elected to the Vice Regal Council,

---

63 Devadhar Papers Correspondence with Gokhale, p.3. NMML (N.60) New Delhi.
64 Devadhar Papers, Letter dated 1st May 1900 (from Mahabaleswar), p.2. NMML, New Delhi.
Devadhar remarked: "they have done due justice to the noble qualities of head and heart which you so remarkably combine in you along with the virtues of a private and public life." Devadhar had in due course developed a passion for public service, especially in the field of education. With a view to devote himself fully to the cause of education and public service he applied for a year's leave from the Aryan Education Society high school Bombay. His intension was to join Gokhale by the middle of September, "I am preparing myself for the life intended to enter upon."

By the closing years of the 1890s the Congress organisation in India was afflicted by doubts and demoralisation. The new generation of enthusiastic young men refused to take the British good faith for granted. Aurobindo Ghose, for example, charged the leaders of the Indian National Congress with lack of vision, courage and earnestness. He pronounced that Congress was an utter failure. Similarly Lajpath Rai was highly critical of the Congress and its programmes and policies. The British committee of the Congress was also on the brink of collapse. Its financial position was so week that it thought of closing down its London office and discontinuing the publication of India. Dadabai Navoroji sought Gokhale's help because Gokhale had been arranging contributions to the British committee from the

---

65 Devadhar papers, Letter dated 26th April 1901, p.6. NMML, New Delhi.
66 Devadhar papers, August 1st 1904, p.6, NMML, New Delhi.
Daccan for several years.\textsuperscript{68} In November 1904 Devadhar wrote to Gokhale that he was free for \textit{India's work}.\textsuperscript{69} Ever since he had been so occupied with "India work" that he went from door to door from morning to evening. Once begging excuse for not being able to write to Gokhale earlier, Devadhar explained that it was not any religious ceremonies, which was holding him back but the "India work". "All along I have been looking upon useful and unselfish work as worship and day by day that conviction is fast growing upon me."\textsuperscript{70}

The sacred ideals of Indian nationalism were a great excitement for Devadhar. Whenever he got an opportunity to speak to small gatherings, he used to address them "about Congress work, patriotism and service and make them aware of the condition of India."\textsuperscript{71} As he wrote to Gokhale, such occasions appealed to him more as calls of duty than temptation for self-advertisement. In his view such contacts with the people went a long way in preparing the ground for genuine work. He also explained to the people about the Ranade Economic Institute and Gokhale's work in that line.\textsuperscript{72}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p.158.
\textsuperscript{69} Devadhar Papers, Letter dated November 15, 1904, p.30, NMML, New Delhi.
\textsuperscript{70} Devadhar Papers, Letter dated 25\textsuperscript{th} January 1905, (from Banaras City) p.63. NMML, New Delhi.
\textsuperscript{71} Devadhar Papers, Letter dated 13\textsuperscript{th} January 1905 (from Jubbalpore Railway Camp) p.63. NMML, New Delhi.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, p.55-56.
\end{flushleft}
From his India work experience Devadhar was convinced of the urgent need for imparting education to the masses. He was annoyed at the plight of the people with crushing taxes imposed upon them. The city of Jubbalpore illustrated his point, where "there has not even the hundredth part of the public spirit that we find elsewhere." The reason, he observed, was that education was at a very low point. According to him, the problem could be tackled with the patience and the zeal of the missionaries by "filtering the blessings of education to the lowest strata of the society". He argued "we must have, if we want to work up or rather awaken up India, an equally efficient and devoted agency". He emphasized that an enormous amount of work had to be undertaken in the field of general education. An earnest beginning ought to be made in that direction as early as possible:

I have my own views in the matter... I urgently feel the need of a class that can move from place to place like traveling teachers or evangelists in Christian countries and immediately undertake the task of freeing the people from the bonds of slavery and superstition, fetters of which have been forged upon them by their own ignorance and dullness.

Devadhar found Gokhale as a great source of wisdom and inspiration. He therefore shared all his concerns with him with great hope for guidance.

---

73 Ibid, p.58.  
74 Ibid, p.58.  
75 Ibid, p.59.  
76 Ibid, p.60.
Gokhale had become by this time a great nationalist leader with a genuine concern for the cause of India and her people. Even abroad Gokhale was found to be the right person to rescue the British Committee of the Indian National Congress, conduct its publicity campaign in England in the wake of the next election. Accordingly he was advised by Wedderburn to reach England by the end of May 1904. He was also elected president of the annual Congress session to be held at Banaras in December 1905. An important event, which took place during this period, was the partition of Bengal, which was caused to change the course of Indian politics. Surendra Nath Banerjee called upon Gokhale to help in this hour of sorest trial. He was asked to meet British leaders and to impress upon them the outrage that had been done to public sentiment by the partition of Bengal. As a friend wrote to Gokhale, "the whole Indian world is at your feet at present". Devadhar was full of admiration for such a towering personality. He wrote, "wherever I go I find that your name is a charm and a center of attraction, you have in my opinion set a whole example of sacrifice and national service before the young generation".

As had already been pointed out in Chapter II, Gokhale was unhappy during this period about some of the Congress leaders' attitude to politics. He

---

79 Devadhar Papers, letter dated 22nd September, 1905, (from Aligarh). p.84, NMML, New Delhi.
was dissatisfied with the idea of mere agitational politics. Instead, he visualized a constructive politics, with programmes, which would contribute to the betterment of public life. His moto was that the public life must be spiritualised. During 1904-1905 Gokhale was very much preoccupied with the idea of an organization for training young men for public life, which for him implies political work of the highest character. Accordingly when the Servants of India Society was established on 12th June 1905 G.K. Devadhar, was one of the three persons to join Gokhale as one of its founder members.

During the period of his extensive tour to various parts of India in connection with "India work" Devadhar had acquired a first hand knowledge about the social backwardness of India. He learnt that the main reason for this backwardness was widespread lack of education of the people of India. As a result he found that "public spirit was at a very low ebb" even in the urban areas. This awareness was a potential motivation for Devadhar to choose educational work as a life-time career.

Devadhar knew that spread of education among Indian women would go a long way in their liberation. His deep concerns and ideas in this respect were presented by him in a Note on Female Education in India submitted to

---


the government of Bombay in response to their letter dated 25th June, 1916, calling for views and suggestions on the subject. He was quite unhappy that the spread of mass education was very hopelessly slow. He demanded more governmental funds and the participation of the local governments in solving the question of backwardness of female education in India. Eventually, with a deep passion for voluntary social work, he got himself associated with several voluntary organizations. He was one of the founders of the Poona Seva Sadan started in 1909 which had branches in different parts of the country to serve the poor, the sick and distressed. He worked as Honorary General Secretary of Seva Sadan Poona, the Seva Sadan Home Classes, Bombay which was working for the Marathi speaking women and several Home Classes' and normal classes committees in Bombay, Poona and Surat. These institutions were meant to cater to the educational needs of married women, grown up unmarried women, girls and widows. They gave literary, industrial, and professional education and training to women. These were run on the pattern of "continuation classes" so common in Western countries, especially in Germany for the education of the labouring class boys as well as the "Mother's schools" in England which aim at training women in the discharge of their domestic duties by equipping them with the necessary amount of

---

83 G.K. Devadhar, A Note on Female Education in India, Poona 1916, p. 15.
85 Ibid., pp.1,2.
literary and other knowledge. They sent woman candidates to appear for the various examinations of the training college for woman in Poona and many of them became teachers in the schools run by the Christian missions, Municipalities and the Seva Sadans. Arrangements were also made for the professional training of women in the medical field such as midwifery and general, surgical and obstetric nursing. As the number of women who opted to take such training was limited, the Seva Sadans introduced women to new professional avenues like sewing, embroidery hosiery, painting, first aid, home nursing, domestic economy and gave certificates of proficiency so as to enable the women candidates to earn a decent livelihood on the strength of the knowledge required. Devadhar's work in the field of female education was appreciated even by the Bombay Government.

Devadhar had clear ideas about the role of women and the role of education in social transformation. He placed great stress on the education of grown up women for several reasons. First, he argued that, "the educated mothers will be missionaries of female education and the elevation and emancipation of their own sex". Secondly educated mothers would be better able to manage their household economically and thus be a source of

86 Ibid.
89 Ibid, p 5.
economic strength to their families especially in the midst of straitened circumstances; thirdly they will be better able to take care of their children and thus materially and intelligently assist in reducing infant mortality; fourthly they will be true companions of their husbands and other male relations by being able to take an intelligent interest in social and national questions and by helping in the gradual realization of the social and political aspirations which were dominating the thoughts of the present generations; and lastly they will be truly efficient and patriotic citizens of the British Empire.\footnote{Ibid, p. 5. When Devadhar speaks of the citizenship of the British Empire, it has to be remembered that the idea of an independent India had not been precipitated as a common ideal in those days.}

Devadhar had genuine ideas on primary education. In his \textit{Note} to the government he suggested that separate girls school should be started in villages with or without a female teacher. The control of village schools should be handed over to local bodies, which should form special educational committees. Local bodies should also try to get people with advanced views on education associated with the local schools. He recommended that in each districts there should be one or two Indian inspectresses knowing the vernacular of the districts to oversee the working of the school.\footnote{\textit{Ibid}, p. 9.} It was the duty of those inspectresses to visit the locality of the school and try to create an interest among the people in and enlist their sympathy with the question of
the education of their sisters and daughters. They should also pursue poor women and widows to avail themselves of the facilities for education afforded by the school. In order to make instruction attractive, he recommended to include subjects like Bhagavat Geetha and Sanskrit especially in Gujrat; some knowledge of cooking; a little of tailoring, laundry and dairying. The committee should be free to determine such matters as the location of the school, curriculum, timetable, social gatherings and price distributions. He further suggested that there was no need for separate schools for caste girls; but in places where the untouchables experience difficulties, separate schools for their education should be provided.92 Another recommendation was to award scholarship for girls as in the case of boys who pass out of the vernacular IVth standard, at which stage the girls' study of English begins. Yet another recommendation was to start at least one primary school teaching up to the vernacular Vth standard with an English class attached to it, in important towns with a population of 5000 and above. In order to meet the shortage of teachers a class for preparing grown up girls and women who

\footnote{Ibid, p.10. This suggestion was an instance which reveals the sagacity of Devadhar, for his idea was to use education as an instrument for social change, rather than making it an issue of conflict and antagonism in the existing complex situation characterised by caste rigidity.}
intend to join the training college, should be attached to the full primary school.93

These ideas of Devadhar were very much in tune with the educational proposals of his master Gokhale, who was the champion of Elementary Education in India. In 1910, Gokhale moved a resolution on this subject in the Imperial Legislative Council urging the government to introduce compulsory elementary Education.94 Piloting the Elementary Education bill in the Council on 16th March 1911 Gokhale emphasized that "the Education of girls is with us even a greater necessity than that of boys and look forward to the time when compulsion will be extended to all children alike of either sex".95 The significance of the views of Gokhale and Devadhar was born out of the governmental approach to Education as it was brought to the notice of the Council by Gokhale: "There was then no separate portfolio of Education, and educational interests rubbed shoulders with jails and the police, in the all-comprehensive charge of the Home Department".96

The other recommendations of Devadhar to the government include establishment of an Anglo-Vernacular Girls' School either in a district town or

93 Ibid, p.10.
95 Ibid, p.616.
in a big taluk town where there is a High School for boys, "continuation classes" for married girls; provision for reading room and library attached to such classes; a local committee with District Hospitals for the training of young women as nurses and midwives.\textsuperscript{97} In the field of secondary education Devadhar pleaded for the establishment of girls' high schools at provincial head quarters or provincial towns or in cities with arts colleges. English should be taught as a second language.\textsuperscript{98} In the field of higher education he suggested that instead of spending money for the establishment of separate Arts Colleges for women, the money should be spent wisely, for popularizing education among women by granting scholarship and establishing hostels etc. However he was farsighted enough to suggest that when number of women taking higher education grows, it would be necessary to begin separate colleges for women which could ultimately lead to the establishment of a separate women's university on the lines of those in America and Japan.\textsuperscript{99} He made a special emphasis on the training of women teachers at all levels. And he pleaded with the government to adopt a policy of full and liberal grants to realize the above objectives, including grants to allow increase of pay of life teachers, grants for the provision of provident funds or pensionary funds for the teachers in private schools and building grants. He also made an


\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 11-12.

additional recommendation for a scheme of scholarship for the best woman candidate to go to foreign countries to complete their education.100

Devadhar's concern for the education of women was not an isolated instance of reform in respect of the female community. A broader view of the general welfare of the society was a guiding thread in the programmes of the Servants of India Society. The kind of attention they paid to the working class, with particular interest in the condition of women workers deserves special mention. It is to be noticed that complementary to the educational reforms of the Servants of India Society as formulated by Gokhale and as reinforced by Devadhar, there was also a growing sense of reforms in respect of the conditions of women workers in large towns and cities. Accordingly recommendation for special legislation to ensure improvement was urged in respect of hours of work, night work, employment of women on dangerous, unhealthy and heavy work, problems regarding maternity and child welfare, law and unequal wages, need for women inspectors and education.101

Devadhar considered it his sacred duty to serve the neglected sections in society. Gandhiji was highly impressed by Devadhar's work at Seva Sadan. He praised it as a monument to his industry, nationalism and his love of service. The phenomenal progress of the Seva Sadan work was considered

100 Ibid., pp.13-14.
101 Godavari Gokhale, A Note on Women Workers in India, Servants of India Society Bombay (For Private Circulation only), undated, pp.1-5.
unique in all India. A deep concern for the well being of the people induced him to work in the field of co-operative movement. Even Gandhiji was highly impressed by his work in the field and desired to discuss with him the national value of the co-operative movement. Gandhiji had maintained very cordial relationship with the Servants of India Society. When V.S. Sreenivasa Sastri resigned as the President of the Society, Devadhar felt called upon to consult Gandhiji, as one of the truest and most devoted friends and supporters of the Servants of India Society. In his reply to Devadhar Gandhiji reciprocated the spiritual bond between the two and encouraged Devadhar in being elected as President of the Society, following the resignation of Sastri. Already, when the Aryabhushan Press of the Society was reduced to ashes, Gandhiji offered to print the Society's organ the Servant of India from Sabarmathi. In his "Notes" published in Young India, Gandhiji reviewed the great services of Poona Sevan Sadan Society, of which Devadhar was the Honorary Organisor and General Secretary. Gandhiji admired Devadhar's "indefatigable energy" in running the affairs of the

Society which was catering to the needs of poor women. However he was critical of the Society's neglect of hand spinning and the use of Khaddar. He reminded them, "To look at it, it is a flimsy cotton thread, but it is stout enough to bind all the millions of India together in its gentle and loving coil".107

Devadhar worked as the Honorary General Secretary of the Indian National Social Conference till 1924. He was the President of the Social Conference organized at Lucknow, in the same year. It was an unrelenting zeal for social reform, which drew him to the Social Conference. He was of the view that the educated classes of India showed a woeful neglect of the problems of social reform.108 In his speech Devadhar referred to the ideals for which the social reform movements stood. In this matter he was very much influenced by Mahadev Govind Ranade whom he considered the Guru of social reformers.109 Ranade was a great patriot who preached reform because, he firmly believed that without reform there was no hope for India as a nation.110 In fact the father and founder of the Indian National Social Conference was Ranade. It was begun in the year 1887 at Madras. Ranade

107 "Mission to the Women of India," Young India, 4.3.1926. NGM.
108 G.K. Devadhar, Presidential Address, Indian National Social Conference, Madras 1933, pp.1-2, NMML.
109 Ibid., p.21.
chalked out a scheme in which he divided the whole country into 16 or 20 circles from which regular reports were sent to him of the steady progress of social reform all over India. Ranade was a great influence on Gokhale when he joined the Deccan Education Society in 1886 and became his disciple.

According to Devadhar three things were necessary for the deliberation of man: 1. Realisation of a new order of society in closest touch with Nature and in which the diseases of class domination and parasitism will have finally ceased; 2. The realization of a science which will no longer be a mere thing of the brain, but a part of actual life; 3. The realization of a morality, which will signalize and express the vital and organic unity of men with his fellows. Social reform is a process comprising these ideals, from which would evolve a higher consciousness as against individual consciousness – heralds of a new era of humanity much higher than what was passed for as civilization. This was in tune with Gokhale's idea of Swadeshism and his ideals of the great work for national liberation – a condition in which people could live "without distinction of caste or creed – unhampered by cramping and unnatural

---

restrictions". Gokhale wanted India to take her proper place among the great nations of the world politically, industrially, in religion, in literature, in science and in arts.

Devadhar, however, was not advocating a political view of social reform. His argument was that politics and social reform were to be brought in a line. Though there was an emphasis on spiritualism the pressure of formulation of a vision of social reform informed by politics is quite remarkable. He was quite quick to realize the problems of women in the social, political process and the hurdles posed by caste groups, which were the disintegrating elements in society. As he put it, "a social reformer does not mince matters as he has to be true to himself. If we, therefore have properly attuned with the rest of the universe, we would learn to trust each other...."

Besides a serious consideration of the depressed classes to create a congenial social environment and a concerted attention to rural reconstruction were among the salient points of Devadhar's idea of social reform. He concluded his presidential address by quoting the words of Ranade, the Guru of social reformers:

---


The way to heaven is a narrow path, and one has to tread upon sharp edged instruments, carefully balancing the weak limbs and spirit. The way to hell is, as you all know, a road well paved with good intentions and we have only to close our eyes and shut our ears, to be listless and indifferent, lead a butterfly existence, and die intellectually and spiritually. We have pursued that way too long, and it is time now that we should take due care to set our house in order, as no mere white washing and no plastering would remove these hidden sources of our weaknesses. The whole existence must be renovated. The baptism of fire and not have water must be gone through by those who seek a renovation of heart such as this.116

As has already been pointed out, it was the Malabar Rebellion of 1921, which served an occasion for the arrival of G.K. Devadhar in Kerala. The President of the Servants of India Society at that time was V.S. Sreenivasa Sastri. Devadhar was deputed to investigate the distressful condition of Malabar.117 Already as a member of the Servants of India Society and as part of "India work" Devadhar was well experienced in moving from place to place and seeing things for himself. He was admired as a model in such investigative work.118 Devadhar and his team were convinced of the miseries of the people affected by the riot and of the need for immediate relief work. Following appeals made through the press and other organizations they were

116 Ibid., pp.21-22.
118 R. Suryanarayana Rao, letter dated 6 February, 1921 to Sreenivasa Sastri, Sastri Papers, File No. R. 29, p.4, NMML.
able to mobilize funds from various quarters of India. Relief camps were set up first at Calicut and subsequently to other places in Malabar, where the people thronged in hundreds for help. The Malabar taluks of Ernad, Valluvanad, Ponnani and part of Kozhikode were affected by the rebellion. Refugees had flowed to Kozhikode in hundreds. These refuges were of two types: those who escaped from the rebel areas in fear of the Mappilas; and those who were caught up in the rebel areas, mainly the Mappilas. Those who could escape from the rebel areas daily flowed to Kozhikode in hundreds, and their population was estimated about 25000. People of all sorts ranging from Brahmin (Namboodiris) to the untouchables were included in them. A large number of women and children and a few Mappilas who were rendered destitutes formed the wretched lot. These people lost not only their pride and honour, but their wealth and homes in the looting and arson that were rampant.

Devadhar was able to raise an amount of Rs.10 lakhs from magnanimous quarters for relief operations in Malabar. With this, the Servants of India Society opened 21 relief camps in various parts of Malabar, where about 26,000 victims and refuges were given shelter. These camps include the ones at Puthiyara, Mooriyad, Manjeri, Thirurangadi, Tanur and

---

the like places.¹²¹ The inmates of the relief camps were provided with essential amenities and a sense of security. The camps continued for several months. Much more than places for food and shelter they turned out to be centers of community life. Systematic arrangements were made in the camps for the education, entertainment, health and even employment of the inmates. Camp schools were also set up for boys and girls. The affairs of the camp were looked after by volunteers who rendered selfless service¹²².

Devadhar had rendered an enormous amount of work in Kerala, particularly in Malabar. He was a pioneer in the field of co-operative movement in Kerala. During the Temple Entry Sathyagraha he played an important role in raising public opinion in favour of the untouchables, as well as, as a mediator. Under his guidance the DMRT developed into a very potential agency for the cause of education, rural reconstruction, social reform and the general welfare and progress of Malabar. The extensive work of the DMRT with the guidance and inspiration of Devadhar will be examined in detail in the next chapter.

Madras decided to release the prisoners of Mappila Rebellion in 1925.\textsuperscript{127} Archival sources reveal that he was taking every opportunity to mediate the question of the rehabilitation of the Mappila prisoners with the government.\textsuperscript{128} Since some action was urgently necessary in the matter he was persistently persuading the government to intervene.\textsuperscript{129}

Rao knew well that education and rural reconstruction were interrelated. He gave particular emphasis in eradicating the illiteracy of rural population. In his report on the DMRT work (1930) he underscored the point that spread of educational was essential in order to free the villagers from poverty, superstition and unhygienic living.\textsuperscript{130} In this matter he always sought the help of government departments such as agriculture, health, co-operation and education. He always urged the people to get involved in the work of the Trust and reminded them that only by embarking on a joint action would it be possible to alleviate the sorrows and sufferings of the rural people.

Suryanarayana Rao was one of the Honorary Joint Secretaries of the Mappila Aid Committee formed in Calicut to rehabilitate the Mappila prisoners of the rebellion. He was making every attempt to raise funds from

\textsuperscript{127} G.O.No.729, 3\textsuperscript{rd} August, 1925, File No. D.Dis 12153/31 dated 25.1.35, p.391. RAK  
\textsuperscript{129} Rao's letter to Wood dt. Nov. 24, 1931. \textit{Ibid.}  
\textsuperscript{130} Report on DMRT work on village extension, \textit{Mathrubhumi Daily}, 24\textsuperscript{th} August 1930, p.7.
various quarters. He suggested that appeals should be made in this regard to the Viceroy, the Governor and even to Prince Nizam. His sense of commitment in such a sympathetic cause was so great that he could bear no excuse for passivity. In his letter to Wood he wrote "our Mappila friends are very slow to move even in matters where the interests of their community was concerned. Still we must get on with them and do what we can".\textsuperscript{131} He wrote to the Sub Collectors of Palghat, Malappuram and Tellicherry, in this connection and persuaded Wood to ask them to arrange for subcommittees.\textsuperscript{132}

The noble ideals and the humble but unassuming work of the Servants of India Society were always a source of inspiration for Suryanarayana Rao. He was able to attract a wide variety of people ranging from laymen to royal personalities to the DMRT programmes. In 1933, participating in the anniversary celebrations of Gokhale School at the \textit{Adidravida}\textsuperscript{133} Colony, Gopalapuram at Moodadi, the Valluvanad Raja, M.C. Vallabha Raja expressed his desire to begin a similar colony in the Valluvanad taluk. And there itself he declared his decision to donate about 13 acrs of land for the purpose. The Thrithala \textit{Adidravida} colony came into existence thus. In admiration of the work of the DMRT, Vallabha Raja further promised all

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{132} \textit{Ibid.}, p.31. Also see Mr. Woods Letter to dated 23.12.1931, Suryanarayana Rao (from Camp Manantoddy), File, \textit{Ibid.}, p.37.
\item \textsuperscript{133} The depressed classes who were untouchables were also known as \textit{Adidravidas}, as they were considered to be the descendents of the primeval tribal inhabitants of Kerala.
\end{itemize}
supports for the upliftment of the depressed classes. Such instances of attracting humanitarian and benevolent souls to the DMRT activities, amply illustrate the persuasive, amicable and altruistic nature of Suryanarayana Rao.\textsuperscript{134}

During his secretaryship Rao was able to enlist great amount of public sympathy for the DMRT Work. He was able to extent the programmes of DMRT in the field of education, rural reconstruction, eradication of social evils like untouchability, unhygienic living and also in making the rural population self-reliant. At this point it is suffice to say that Rao was a man of great concern for the welfare of the people and an embodiment of service. The reformist zeal in him went to the extent of casting aspersions on nationalist programmes like non-co-operation. Nor was he concerned with academic discussion whether reforms are adequate or inadequate. When he describes political workers as 'mischief markers', it is not the voice of an anti-nationalist that we hear, but statements of a genuine social worker.\textsuperscript{135} Several senior citizens of Malabar\textsuperscript{136} acknowledged in glowing words that the people of Malabar were the beneficiaries of the services rendered by him. His achievements were remarkable, for had to perform his tasks amidst

\textsuperscript{135} Suryanarayana Rao's letter dated 6\textsuperscript{th} Feb. 1921 to Sreenivasa Sastri, Sreenivasa Sastri Papers, Op. cit., p.5, NMML.
\textsuperscript{136} Several senior citizens, both related and unrelated with DMRT, were interviewed. See Tanur Parameswaran, Sri. T. Assanarkutti, Sri. T. Narayanan Master (Tanur), Sri. Karthat Balachandran (Palakkad), Sri. Theruvath Raman (Calicut).
uncongenial circumstances. He was a stranger to this place, being a man from outside Kerala. The problem of language was another hurdle for him.

As a true 'Servant of India' Rao inherited Gokhale's secular spirit. In a caste-ridden society he embodied true egalitarianism. He remained too humble to be conspicuous. The poor people of DMRT centres could recognise his simplicity and sincerity. He had shown an exemplary model in the running of public institutions. For him service was its own reward. He was very strict and punctual in the conduct of affairs. In addition to DMRT work he was also in charge of the Depressed Class Mission of Mangalore. Rao, who spent his youthful years for the service of Malabar in his capacity as Honorary Secretary of DMRT till November 1934 had to resign from the post on grounds of ill health. Ever since he changed his long years of stay at Calicut and moved to Coimbatore as advised by his doctor. On 27th November, 1934 he resigned his post and in his place V.R. Nayanar was elected as the Honorary Secretary of DMRT.

**A.V. Thakkar**

Another very important personality who energized the social reform work of Kerala was Amirtlal Vithaldas Thakkar (A.V. Thakkar Bappa). In 1914 he joined the SIS after resigning from his job as an overseer in Bombay

---

Municipality. He was born on 26 November 1869 at Bhavnagar in Sourashtra in an ordinary family as the son of Vithaldas Thakkar and Mulibai. He soon engaged himself in the famine relief work in the Western Province, and other activities like co-operative work, education of the Bhangis, prohibition and welfare of Khadi workers. His work among the Bhils was much admired. He founded the Bhil Seva Mandal in 1922 to elevate the condition of the Bhils and other aboriginals of India.

As the SIS was opposed to political works like Satyagraha, Bappa chose to work in the area of Harijan service, which was quite in tune with the ideals of the Society. When Gandhiji established the Harijan Sevak Sangh in 1932, Sri Bappa was chosen as its general secretary. He travelled with Gandhiji in 1933-34 throughout India to convey the messages of the Sangh and to organise its units in various parts of the country. Its Malabar Branch was formed in 1932 itself.

141 Viyogi Hari, Deenbandu Thakkar Bappa (Hindi) nd, Delhi, p.3.
143 Viyogi Hari, op. cit., p.20.
In 1935 Bappa visited Kerala to gain a first hand knowledge of the condition of the life of Harijans and other depressed classes there.\textsuperscript{145} In 1941 he visited Calicut. In his speech given as a reply to a commendation given to him, he exhorted that a good amount of work remains to be done among the "thottis" and the tribals.\textsuperscript{146} He further gave suggestions to reconstitute the Malabar Branch of the Sangh at a meeting held at Payyannur presided over by V.R. Nayanar and attended by members like K.A. Damodara Menon, P. Sankunni Nambar, M. Chadyayn and Swami Anandathirtha.\textsuperscript{147}

Bappa's next visit was in 1943, when the condition of Malabar was quite distressful due to cholera. He inaugurated at Gopalapuram a building meant to accommodate the children of cholera victims. He asked the teachers of the Gopalapuram School to take special care of the orphaned children. He then proceeded to Muttom near Pazhayangadi and inaugurated an orphanage for the Muslim children. The Muslims of Muttom accorded him a grand welcome. He reminded the people that more than thirty thousand people lost their lives in Malabar due to cholera. Again, with Nayanar he proceeded to Mathamangalam near Payyanur. He attended the annual day celebrations of the Ayurvedic dispensary, which was working there.\textsuperscript{148} In one year nearly

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Mathrubhumi Daily, Kozhikode, 6 March, 1935, p.3, col.4.}
\footnote{Mathrubhumi Daily, Kozhikode, 24 Sept. 1941, p.6; Night Soil Workers were called "thottis" in Kerala.}
\footnote{Mathrubhumi Daily, Kozhikode, 27 Nov., 1941, p.2.}
\footnote{Mathrubhumi Daily, 10\textsuperscript{th} October, 1943, p. 2.}
\end{footnotes}
10,000 people were given treatment from this dispensary. He made arrangements for the education of Paniya boys of Thalolkadu area. He also distributed dhothies to the Harijans and Paniyas who gathered there. Another meeting was held at Mathamangalam elementary school in which M. Chadayan, Swami Anandathirtha and K.G. Nambiar spoke. Thakkar Bappa and party then stayed as the guests of Vengayil Nayanar of Kanayi. In 1948 he came to Malabar to visit the Nayanar Memorial Paniya Colony built at Chelod near Nilambur. He was accompanied by his Secretary, Ram Saran, DMRT Honorary Secretary, L.N. Rao and Shyamji Sundardas. He was satisfied with the work done there.149

Thakkar Bappa was a man who devoted his entire life for the cause of the downtrodden.150 He was inspired by the ideals and principles of Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Mahatma Gandhi. When he decided to associate himself with the SIS Gandhiji rightly described him as a loan of Harijan Sevak Sangh to the SIS. Besides undertaking extensive work for the service of Harijans and depressed classes throughout India, Bappa was actively involved in redressing the grievances of the people during the nation wide famine of 1943. Famine was extremely acute in Karnataka, Malabar, Kochi-

---

149 Mathrubhumi daily, Kozhikode, 10 Oct., 1943, p.2; also see 18th May, 1948, p. 4.
Travancore, Orissa and Bengal. He toured to these places and helped in setting up relief operations. Bappa was the secretary of the Kasturba Memorial Fund organised in 1944 for the welfare of woman and children. He worked closely with Mahatma Gandhi during the Navakhali riots to mitigate violence. In Kerala he was particularly interested in the work of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, the SIS and the DMRT. He was a great inspiration to the people when he visited Malabar several times in these connections. Bappa's long and dedicated life came to an end on 19th January 1951.

V.S. Sreenivasa Sastri

Sreenivasa Sastri was born on 24th September 1869 as the son of a schoolteacher at Kumbhakonam of Thanjavur district. After graduation he worked as a teacher at schools at Mayavaram, Selem and Madras. In 1902 he became Head Master of Triplicane High School, Madras. He was very much attracted to the principles and objectives Gokhale's SIS. On 15th January 1907 he joined the SIS. Recalling the moment of taking the vow of the Society, Sastri wrote, "Gokhale's deportment was solemn and inspired me with something like awe. As I pronounced the phrases of each vow after him

152 Ibid., p.29.
153 Ibid., p.30.
I was seized with terrible misgivings as to my being able to keep them in a tolerable degree. In 1907 Sastri attended the Surat Congress and was an eye-witness to the 'split' between the "extremists" and the "moderates". He also had very close contact with Gandhi. Both Gokhale and Gandhiji admired his organisational skill, oratorial brilliance and integrity. He worked as the member of the Madras Legislative Assembly from 1913. In 1916 he was elected to the Central Legislative Council. In 1916 when Gokhale died he was elected as President of SIS. Sastri formed an organisation called National Liberal Federation in 1918. He supported the recommendations of Montague-Chelmsford Reforms (1918). His view of the nationalist movement and his attitude to the British were very moderate. He soon became a great spokesman of Congress moderate camp. He did not support the Civil Disobedience movement initiated by the Congress in 1920. He was a member of moderatem delegation to Britain to apprise the government of the conditions of India.

In the mid 1920s Sastri visited Kerala. He was given a very cordial welcome everywhere. Through speeches and writings he exhorted that India should attain self-rule by continuing as a part of British Empire. Because of such a 'liberal' view he could not agree with the political programmes of the

156 V.S. Sreenivasa Sastri, My Master Gokhale, Madras, 1946, p.82.
Congress like Civil Disobedience.\textsuperscript{159} He made appeals to the people of Malabar to make contributions to the SIS to be used to renovate its presses Aryabhushan and Dyanaprakash which were destroyed in fire.\textsuperscript{160} At Ernakulam he was accorded a cordial welcome.\textsuperscript{161}

Sastri's scholarship, political wisdom, patriotism were all appreciated by the people and the press. However, the press in particular was critical of some of his positions which were opposed to Congress programmes on the ground that what the country needed in those days were active political work rather than mild exhortations, advices and acrimony. The Mathrubhumi voiced this view in particular in an editorial.\textsuperscript{162} In a modest criticism, the paper pointed out that, though very able, Sastri could not frame a programme of action suitable for the existing conditions. It said, "when the people of the country are directly involved in a struggle for the total freedom of their country, Sastri does not side with them, but chose to devote his life making futile speeches to them in his capacity as a feeble member of an Empire's council in which the people at large have no significant role and recognition".\textsuperscript{163} The editorial found fault with Sastri for having supported the government in its anti-Congress measures through persecutions, and asked

\textsuperscript{159} Mathrubhumi Daily, 18 Nov. 1924, p.4.
\textsuperscript{160} Mathrubhumi Daily, 24 June, 1924, p.3.
\textsuperscript{161} Mathrubhumi Daily, 5 Oct. 1926, p.5.
\textsuperscript{162} Mathrubhumi Daily, 7 Oct. 1926, p.4.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., p.4.
him to rise up to the occasion in a fitting manner. Following the report of Simon Commission in 1930, when British Government summoned in London a Round Table Conference to consider the question of the Indian Constitution, Sastri was one of the Indian delegates to attend the same.164

Sastris last visit to Malabar was in 1933. He came to Calicut to speak on the occasion of the 18th death anniversary of Gokhale. This time he stated that it was necessary to work for the realisation of a united Indian nation, irrespective of communal considerations. He reminded that Gokhale never exhorted for separate constituency and disproportionate representation. He pointed out that after Gokhale's death both the moderates and extremists were inspired by Gokhale. They were looking for Gokhale's statements in his speeches and other records to justify their own programmes and policies. Those who were suspicious of him in his lifetime, both within and outside the government now began to recognise him as a model for the respect to opposition and statesmanship.165 His consideration for the Muslims was highly acclaimed. He argued that administrative reforms would never lead to responsible government, what is ultimately required is the right to government. However, reforms would contribute to the furthering of the

164 R.C. Majudnar et al., Op.cit., p.p. 907-8. The other members of the Indian delegation were Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Mr. C.Y. Chintamoni, Dr. B.R. Ambdekar and Sir. Muhammed Shafi.

necessary condition for such a desire. Both he and Gokhale supported the Minto-Morley Reforms on these grounds.\textsuperscript{166}

During 1921-32 periods Sastri visited several countries within the British Empire. He was also elected as a member of the Privi Council. In 1927 he took charge as the Agent of India Government in South Africa. He was interested in the education of Indians in South Africa. He started a college for them and prepared a housing project. In 1929 he returned to India. During 1935-40 he was Vice-Chancellor of Annamalai University.\textsuperscript{167} He passed away on 17\textsuperscript{th} April, 1946 while addressing a gathering at Madras.\textsuperscript{168}

\textbf{V.R. Nayanar}

The life of V.R. Nayanar was a unique episode in the history of the Servants of India Society in Kerala. Due to historical reasons the work of the Society in Kerala was mainly confined to erstwhile Malabar district. For more than two decades he was intimately associated with the Society. He rendered an astonishing amount of public service with great missionary zeal, in conditions of extreme hardships. But he was quite selfless and unassuming in performing the task, which he took up as the mission of his life. In the short

\textsuperscript{166} \textit{Ibid.}


span of his life he embodied the high ideals of the Servants of India Society in such perfect terms in which his master Gokhale conceived them.\textsuperscript{169}

V.R. Nayanar was born in 1900 in an affluent \textit{janmi} (landlord) family — Varikkara - of Kunhimangalam village of former Chirakkal taluk of Kannur district. His parents were Ayilliat Rairu Nambiar and Varikkara Kallyani Amma. Being the eldest son, he was given the name of his father according to their tradition. Later Varikkara Rairu Nayanar was popularly known as V.R. Nayanar.\textsuperscript{170} The Nayanars were a small aristocratic group of families comprised mainly to the North Kerala districts of Kannur and Kasargod.\textsuperscript{171} Nayanar's father wanted his son to be a doctor. After his B.A. degree he joined the Medical College to become a doctor. But he found it difficult to continue Medical studies. Dissection of dead bodies and practical work in the laboratory were all-sickening for him. Eventually he discontinued his medical

\textsuperscript{169} All the persons interviewed as part of this study attested these facts.


\textsuperscript{171} Traditionally "Nayanar" is a title conferred on the scholars of Tamil Nadu. Legend has it that the Nayanar families of North Kerala were the descendants of a Tamil Nayanar whom the Pandya King assigned to accompany the Raja of Chirakkal as a token of goodwill, when the latter met the Pandya King while he was on a pilgrimage to Madurai Meenakshi Temple. The Raja was pleased to take the whole family of that warrior including two younger sisters and mother to his country and provided him with splendid accommodation with considerable landed property. The male members of the family were assigned the commander's position of the Chirakkal Rajas. The Nayanar warrior married away his sisters to esteemed Nambiar families of North Kerala. The Nayanars descended from this relationship.
studies.¹⁷² For sometime Nayanar was interested in politics and worked as the Secretary of Thalassery branch of Swarajya Party.¹⁷³

Nayanar's father thought of effecting a change in his son. He asked him to go for a tour to Madras, Bombay and other cities. In the course of this tour he came to the head quarters of Servants of India Society in Poona. He was greatly impressed by the aims and objectives of the Society. He learnt more about the Society's work and soon felt called upon to follow its ideals. He stayed a few months there working as a librarian. This was for him some kind of apprenticeship in the activities of the Society's work. He soon returned to Malabar as a representative of the Society and standard work at Calicut.

Nayanar's urge for public service got ample opportunities following the Malabar riot of 1921. He was the volunteer captain of a refugee camp set up in Calicut. He took great care of the victims of the Rebellion.¹⁷⁴ Refugee camps were also organised by the Congress in Calicut and Thrissur under the leadership of K.P. Kesava Menon and Kurur Neelakantan Namboodirippad respectively.¹⁷⁵ In Calicut there were other camp set up at Azchavattam,

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p.88.
Mooriyad, Francis Road, Puthiyara, Chalappuram, etc.\textsuperscript{176} Nayanar worked day and night collecting food and materials for the refugees in the camp.\textsuperscript{177} He considered it his sacred duty to serve and protect the poor and destitute. He also served as a member of the Mappila Aid Committee formed to provide relief and help to the suffering Mappilas after the riot.\textsuperscript{178}

When the DMRT was formed in Calicut, Nayanar was selected as one of its main workers at the instance of G.K. Devadhar.\textsuperscript{179} As an associate of Suryanarayana Rao,\textsuperscript{180} who was in charge of the SIS of Malabar, Nayanar had already become a seasoned social worker. When Suryanarayana Rao resigned from his position as the Honorary Joint Secretary of SIS, his place was taken by Nayanar during this period. Nayanar's zeal for social service was so immense that he left no area untouched. He was at the forefront of the programme for eradication of untouchability, against superstitions and social evils, for providing education to the downtrodden people and in fostering communal harmony.\textsuperscript{181} These activities were mainly undertaken as the

\textsuperscript{177} Interview with Theruvath Raman, on 20-03-2005.
\textsuperscript{181} \textit{Ibid.}, p.17.
programmes of DMRT. These were envisaged as means to set right the condition of Malabar which was distorted by the Rebellion.182

Along with social work, Nayanar also found time to engage himself with political activities. During 1924-1928 he was the Secretary of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee.183 He was instrumental in setting up Congress Committees in North Malabar. At his instance Congress Committee was formed in Kanhangad in 1924; the Hozdurg Taluk Congress Committee was organised by him in 1925. 184 When Nehru visited Kerala to preside over the Fourth Kerala Political Conference held at Payyannur on 25, 26, 27 May 1928, V.R. Nayanar was an active participant. When a resolution was moved by K. Madhavan Nair recommending the ensuing Calcutta Congress, demanding India's total independence as the aim of the Congress, V.R. Nayanar along with K. Kelappan, C. Kuttan Nair and Kurur supported the resolution.185 Again, The State Congress launched its struggle for responsible government on 26, Aug. 1938, against the idea of independent Travancore piloted by Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer. The KPCC led by Muhammed Abdurahiman formed a support committee and its members were EMS, P.

---

182 Mathrubhumi daily, dt. 30th July, 1933, p.7; 22nd November, 1933, p.2; 14th January, 1934, p.5; 9th March, 1934, p.8.
184 K.K.N. Kurup, Ibid., pp. 11, 133.
Krishna Pillai, P. Narayanan Nair and K.A. Damodara Menon. The Malabar Committee of the Congress decided to lead a procession to Travancore in support of its agitation. The Captain of the procession was A.K. Gopalan. On Sept. 9, 1938, a great public meeting was held at Calicut beach in support of the Malabar procession to Travancore. The meeting was addressed by Muhammed Abdurahiman, V.R. Nayanar, U. Gopala Menon, Kozhipurath Madhava Menon and K. Damodara Menon.\(^{186}\)

The SIS and the DMRT did great relief operations in Malabar during the famine of 1923-24\(^{187}\) and the flood of 1927-28. Similarly when the cholera epidemic broke out in Malabar in 1942-43 the SIS and the DMRT rendered, under the leadership of Nayanar, an immense amount of relief work for which there was no parallel in contemporary history.\(^{188}\) Their other programmes for which Nayanar gave able leadership include adult education, co-operative ventures, cottage industries, agricultural training, etc.

An area in which Nayanar focused great attention was general education. It was one of his great convictions that education could serve as an agency for social change. Nayanar's role as a teacher and as an educationist in the period of nationalist struggle in Malabar was not adequately recognised.


Besides general education Nayanar was also greatly interested in 'workers education', on the pattern of Workers Education Association, which functioned in European countries like England. He was very keen to use education and knowledge to fight against religious and caste based superstitions.

Nayanar also had the profile of a trade unionist and journalist. In the 1920s he worked among the tile workers of Feroke and organized them. His set up a centre to give them workers education. For sometime he worked as the editor of the *West Coast Spectator*; at the same time he was also associated with another newspaper *Manorama*, both published from Calicut.

Nayanar was also associated with the activities of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. Kongattil Raman Menon was the president of the Malabar Harijan Sevak Sangh right from its inception. After him V.R. Nayanar took charge as President and continued till his death. He was also associated with Kelappaji and his social and educational work for the Harijans. In his busy life Nayanar wrote several articles on various topics and authored a few books

---

190 Interview with Theruvath Raman *Op. cit.*
including Pouradharmam (co-authored by P.M. Kuttikrishnan Nair) and a biography of Gopala Krishna Gokhale.

Wherever people were in distress due to illness, poverty and other calamities Nayanar and his teams of workers were always prepared to extend alms to them. He once undertook a hazardous journey to Lakadives and the Andaman islands to provide them help when they were severely tormented by illness and poverty.¹⁹³ Throughout Malabar he set up several dispensaries.¹⁹⁴ In order to protect and rehabilitate the people and children left orphaned and destitute by the Malabar riot as well as by cholera he set up orphanages from Chirakkal on the north to Ponnani on the south.¹⁹⁵

Born and brought up in an aristocratic family Nayanar could have secured very high positions in life. By virtue of his intelligence and daringness he could have added up to the traditional fame and name of his family. But a noble soul infused with a high sense of commitment to the cause of the suffering lot of his country and induced by characteristic sympathy to the poor and downtrodden, Nayanar chose an unassuming path of selfless service, in the course of which he had to sacrifice his own life.¹⁹⁶ His personal life was quite tragic. Soon a daughter was born to him, his wife

¹⁹⁵ Thikkotiyan, V.R. Nayanar Smaranika, Kannur, 1984, p.68.
passed away. On the advice of his friends and relatives, in 1940, he married Madhavikkutti Amma of Kayarat family of Ottapalam and settled near DMRT centre, Tanur. Madhavikkutti Amma, popularly known as Mrs. Nayanar. She emulated the service mentality of her husband. When cholera broke out in Valappad and Nattika of Thrissur and in parts of Malabar she led relief operations.

Nayanar passed away on 14 May, 1945 quite early in life. In the course of continuous and restless work he had contracted exima. On his way to preside over an anniversary of a school in North Malabar, he walked quite a long distance and his illness got aggravated. Following an acute fever he lost his life. Nayanar was deeply mourned by the people of Malabar. He was praised as a embodiment of honesty, innocence and integrity. As a protector of the distressed lot none was equal to him in Kerala. In its editorial Mathrubhumi described Nayanar as a man who was prepared to take up unattractive, and hazardous, but extremely important tasks as a veteran servant of the country and above all as a most merciful human being, a Yogi in the right sense.

198 Karthat Balachandran, op. cit., p.19.
Mrs. V.R. Nayanar

The death of Nayanar created a gap in the public life of Malabar which, could not easily be filled in.\(^{201}\) In the words of Thikkodiyan "the light has gone out unexpectedly. All along it was darkness. None came forward to lighten the way. It was not because of the lack of able persons and individuals. But none dared to shoulder the burden of great responsibilities. They were reluctant to do so".\(^{202}\) After the death of Nayanar the institutions set up and looked after by him found it difficult to continue their work. The person who came to Calicut on behalf of the SIS to take charge of them was L.N. Rao, a man from outside Kerala. He was least bothered about running these institutions. On examining the records, he was in a haste to shut down many of them.\(^{203}\)

At this juncture, however, Mrs. Nayanar thought of continuing public work, in her own humble way, she came to Calicut and took up the task of running the Balika Sadanam, an orphanage established by her husband. She was the Honorary Secretary of the Nayanar Balika Sadanam Trust till her death in 1985.\(^{204}\) She took special interest in the education of the Harijan girls of the Sadanam. In her work she was also assisted by her brother Vasu.

\(^{201}\) Mathrubhumi Daily, Ibid.


\(^{203}\) Ibid., p. 184.

Menon, himself a freedom fighter. Mrs. Nayanar was a unique example in Malabar women in public life. Though her committed and unrelenting activities for the cause of destitute girls. She set a model for this spirit of service and kept the flame of SIS idealism alive for decades even after the SIS/DMRT ceased functioning in Malabar. That way she had contributed her share respect of women empowerment. The Sadanam is the only institution which continues functioning in the SIS/DMRT model even now. Details of the activities of the Sadanam have been given in the section on "relief operations".

The above section presents only a brief life sketch of the eminent leaders of SIS, highlighting their connection with Kerala. But the SIS and the DMRT was able to become popular movements owing to the selfless involvement of a number of local workers and volunteers through its various programmes and activities. However special mention must be made about the services of men like Tanur Paremeswaran, P.M. Kuttikrishnan Nair, (Palakkad), T.V. Kuttikrishnmenon (Tanur), P.P. Menon, P.M. Kumaran Nair, R.C. Paul, T.Velayudhan (Kozhikode), T. Assanarkutty (Tanur), Karthat Balachandra Menon (Tanur), T. Narayananan Master (Tanur), Lakshmi Amma (Tanur), and Ammini Amma (Kozhikode). Besides there must be quite a number of other workers about whom, details are not known but were equally

206 Ibid.
important in the SIS/DMRT work. For want of adequate information they are not mentioned here though the role of such unidentified workers are respectfully acknowledged. The workers of the SIS/DMRT truly shared the characteristics of the social workers as enumerated by Dr. Rajendra Prasad:

Humility and dedication should be the watchwords of the workers. It is after all no obligation that the social worker is going to confer on the sufferer. He is there to come for himself in the way of moral and spiritual uplift more than he is going to give to the sufferer in the way of physical comfort; and this thought ought to make him humble and keen.207

A detailed account of the work done by them will be examined in the next chapter.

207 Rajendra Prasad, "Forword" to J.C. Kumarappa, *Orgaisation and Account of Relief Work*, Wardha, 1947, p.III: (Dr. Rajendra Prasad was the Chairman of the Bihar Central Relief Committee, established in the wake of the disastrous earthquake of 15th January, 1934).